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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 29 September 2011, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Tommo Monthe ..... (Cameroon)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Kelapile

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Organization of work (A/C.5/66/1; A/C.5/66/L.1)

1. **The Chair** invited members to consider the proposed tentative and provisional programme of work of the Committee for the main part of the session. The tentative programme of work had been prepared on the basis of the list of agenda items allocated to the Committee by the General Assembly (A/C.5/66/1). The note on the status of preparedness of the relevant documentation for those items (A/C.5/66/L.1) did not reflect the reports issued or submitted since the date of its issuance. A separate list on the status of documentation would be issued for the first and second parts of the resumed session.

2. He wished to highlight some of the recommendations made by the General Committee in its first report (A/66/250) and adopted by the Assembly at its 2nd plenary meeting. The Fifth Committee should complete its work for the main part of the session by 9 December 2011. In view of financial constraints, meetings of the Main Committees, including informal meetings, should start promptly at 10 a.m. and be adjourned by 6 p.m. The General Assembly had also decided, in accordance with past practice, to waive the requirement that at least one quarter of the members of a Main Committee should be present in order to declare a meeting open and to permit debate to proceed. It had drawn attention to rules 106, 109, 114 and 115 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly governing the right to speak in a Committee and the length of statements.

3. Efforts should be made to reduce the number of resolutions adopted, and resolutions should not contain requests for reports from the Secretary-General unless such reports were strictly necessary for the implementation of those resolutions or for the continued consideration of an item. Resolutions should be short and action-oriented. In addition, the Main Committees should merely take note of the reports of the Secretary-General or of subsidiary bodies which did not require a decision by the Assembly and should neither debate nor adopt resolutions on them unless specifically requested to do so.

4. With regard to the programme budget, he drew attention to rule 153 of the rules of procedure on statements of programme budget implications and to paragraphs 12 and 13 of General Assembly decision 34/401 on the need to allow sufficient time for the Secretariat to prepare estimates of expenditure arising from draft resolutions and for the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee to consider such estimates. By that decision, the Assembly had requested the Fifth Committee, as a general practice, to consider accepting without debate the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the financial implications of draft resolutions up to a limit of $25,000 on any one item. Firm deadlines should be set for the submission of reports of subsidiary organs to be considered by the Fifth Committee. A minimum of 48 hours were required for the Secretary-General to review the programme budget implications of proposals before the Assembly. Accordingly, he urged delegations to convey to their colleagues in the other Main Committees the importance of ensuring timely consideration of and action on draft proposals with programme budget implications.

5. **Mr. Di Luca** (Argentina), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that despite welcome improvements in the timely submission of documents for the Fifth Committee in recent years, the goal of 90 per cent compliance had not been met. He stressed the need for the timely issuance of documents in all six official languages in accordance with the six-week rule and expressed the hope that a solution would be found so as to enable the Committee to work effectively.

6. He welcomed the balanced programme of work prepared by the Bureau. In accordance with past practice, the Group would endorse the proposed programme on the understanding that it would be reviewed and amended after the first week, as needed.

7. As always, the Committee's deliberations should be inclusive and transparent to ensure that decision-making took place among the entire membership, not within small groups. The negotiation process, a confidence-building exercise driven by Member States, must be allowed to run its course. Member States had a collective responsibility to take decisions that were beneficial to the Organization and enabled it to discharge its mandates effectively and efficiently.

8. **Ms. Pakarati** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Group opposed indiscriminate cuts to the programme budget: the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies must be allocated the funds necessary to fulfil their mandates. The announced

reductions in resources for development in general, and particularly for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, were a matter of concern. The Commission, one of the main United Nations entities addressing development issues in the region, worked efficiently and effectively in a number of economic spheres that had a significant bearing on social improvement and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

9. The Group was also concerned that approximately one quarter of the regular budget was allocated to special political missions: the Fifth Committee should consider alternative ways of funding such missions. While Member States must ensure that the Organization had the funding it required to function efficiently and discharge its mandates, they should also scrutinize and prioritize each of the Secretary-General's proposals.

10. The senior advisory group to consider rates of reimbursement to troop-contributing countries called for by General Assembly resolution 65/289 should be established in strict accordance with the resolution through a consultative process to allow for adequate representation of the States concerned. A successful outcome would depend on the legitimacy enjoyed by the advisory group in the eyes of Member States; proper representation and geographical balance in the composition of the group would therefore be crucial.

11. Lastly, the Rio Group urged Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time and condemned any unilateral act or measure taken against a Member State to hinder the payment of its contributions.

12. **Mr. Coffi** (Côte d'Ivoire), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the late issuance of documents remained a challenge for the Committee. Despite the progress made in recent years, the compliance rate for timely issuance remained below the benchmark of 90 per cent. All pending reports should be issued expeditiously and a lasting solution should be found.

13. He reiterated the Group's view that the Committee should conduct its work in a transparent and inclusive manner.

14. **Mr. Torsella** (United States of America) said that the Committee was meeting at a time of severe worldwide economic challenge in which financial resources were scarcer for all Member States, efficiency was ever more important and all leaders must be accountable to their citizens for their fiscal decisions. At such a time, the United Nations could not afford to conduct business as usual, yet too much of the proposed programme budget represented just that.

15. His delegation had applauded the Secretary-General's call for managers to cut 3 per cent or more from their budget outlines, but not all of the Organization had risen to the challenge. A reduction in planned expenditure was not a cut, but merely a smaller increase than originally projected. The relevant test of fiscal discipline was whether the Organization would spend less in 2012-2013 than it had in 2010-2011: the proposed budget failed that test.

16. His Government approved the proposed cuts to conference services and abolition of vacant posts, but there were too few financially meaningful and sustainable economy measures, with reductions proposed in only half of the 37 budget fascicles before the Committee. A large part of the Organization's costs were for personnel, yet the Secretary-General proposed to abolish only 44 out of over 10,000 posts. Taking into account the additional resources that would be requested during the session, the result could be an alarming total programme budget of $5.5 billion for the biennium 2012-2013, representing an increase of 2 per cent, not a reduction.

17. The United Nations regular budget had grown from $2.6 billion in 2001-2002 to $5.4 billion in 2010-2011. While some of the increase was justified by new mandates that all Member States could be proud of, those mandates did not account for the trend. Special political missions might influence the picture for several years, but they were non-permanent expenses that did not have the same long-term impact as regular budget posts. Even excluding expenditure for such missions, the budget had increased by 75 per cent in a decade.

18. The budget lines for general operating expenses, staff travel, and grants and contributions should be scrutinized. Personnel, however, was the most important driver of long-term costs. In the previous 10 years the number of posts had increased by 15 per cent, from 8,989 to 10,307, while total compensation to employees had increased by 70 per cent. Average total compensation for a staff member was $238,000 biannually. He wished to know how management

intended to bring those numbers and costs back into line. He also wondered why Member States were told, for example, how many meetings were scheduled, but not how much the United Nations spent on health care for its staff. He reiterated his delegation's objection to the piecemeal presentation of the budget proposal and the lack of real financial analysis it contained. Budgets and the budget process should be streamlined to yield transparency, flexibility, managerial accountability and analysable, actionable information.

19. The business-like focus on efficiency was not his Government's alone: leaders from around the world, including in developing countries, had begun to advocate doing more with less. Examples abounded of public organizations that had managed, through an entrepreneurial approach, to save money and improve results. Money did not equal mandates and resources did not equal results: the question was whether every dollar was being used in the most efficient and effective way.

20. On the budget proposal to be considered by the Committee, he had a number of specific concerns. First, he was troubled that the Secretary-General's proposal relating to the new system of administration of justice was not yet available, as the costs arising from United Nations Dispute Tribunal and Appeals Tribunal decisions could be significant. Second, the delay in deploying the Umoja enterprise resource planning system and the potential for additional costs were matters of concern. The project should be implemented on time, without additional resources and with quantifiable savings. Third, for the Office of Information and Communications Technology, the priorities should be to complete Umoja and demonstrate the tangible results achieved with resources already allocated before making proposals for additional staff and resources. Fourth, the Committee should give the Office of Internal Oversight Services the resources and tools required to render it a robust office capable of making real management improvements at the United Nations.

21. Major stakeholders must be in agreement if the Committee was to reach the broadest possible consensus on any issue; his delegation would work closely with others during the upcoming session to that end. He called for a department-by-department and line-by-line review of the budget proposal in order to achieve a sustainable reduction in the Organization's expenses and set a new course of fiscal restraint.

22. **Mr. Okochi** (Japan) said that the Fifth Committee made all possible efforts, even working until the very last moment in the early hours of the morning, to reach the broadest possible agreement on the matters before it, as mandated by General Assembly resolution 41/213. He was confident that the Committee would continue to discharge that mandate in a spirit of cooperation.

23. At the current session the Committee would consider, in addition to the budget proposals for the biennium 2012-2013, systemic issues such as funding of special political missions, backstopping arrangements and recosting methodologies. The Secretariat should submit the related reports as soon as possible so that the Committee had sufficient time for thorough analysis and discussion.

24. **The Chair** said that he took it that the Committee approved the proposed tentative and provisional programme of work on the understanding that the Bureau would take into account the views expressed and make the necessary adjustments.

25. *It was so decided.*

26. **The Chair** suggested that a deadline of 15 October should be set for the submission of candidacies for appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary bodies and other appointments and that the elections should be held on 4 November. He took it that the Committee had no objection to the suggestion.

27. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.